SECTION I:
Background of the New York African Burial Ground Project

Chapter 1

Introduction

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The New York African Burial Ground (NYABG) was "rediscovered" in 1989 in the process of preparation for the construction of a proposed 34-story Federal office building by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) at 290 Broadway in New York City (Ingle et al. 1990). The site for the proposed building was once part of the African Burial Ground (ABG) that extended "from Chambers Street on the south to Duane Street on the north and from Centre Street on the east to Broadway on the west" (Yamin, 2000: vii). A full-scale archaeological excavation was conducted by Historic Conservation and Interpretation (HCI) and John Milner Associates, Inc., preceding the building project, as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) in order to mitigate the destruction of potential cultural resources (see Figure 1.1). The excavation and construction site on the ABG is located at Foley Square, in the

Figure 1.1: Early Archaeological Excavation of the African Burial Ground

city block bounded by Broadway, Duane, Reade, and Elk Streets in Lower Manhattan, one block north of City Hall.

Archaeological excavation and building construction began during the summer of 1991 and ended in the summer of 1992, when the U.S. Congress called for work on the site to cease in response to the public demand to properly memorialize and, ultimately, to learn about the people buried there. A research team was assembled by Michael Blakey of Howard University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, beginning in April of 1992, for post-excavation analysis, laboratory, and interdisciplinary studies. The research team members, who studied the skeletal remains of the 419 individuals representative of eighteenth century interred African captives and their descendants, were from Howard's W. Montague Cobb Biological Anthropology Laboratory and eight other affiliated universities. This report presents the data and analyses of human skeletal remains from the NYABG produced after more than nine years of research.

Historic Background and Significance of the Cemetery

The original cemetery had been established by 1712 when it was reportedly the location of the executions of participants in an African rebellion during that same year. Its use officially ended in 1794. There is no written record of the cemetery prior to 1712; however, a 1697 ban barring the burial of "blacks, Jews and Catholics" by Trinity Church suggests that the cemetery might have been created earlier than 1712 in response to a growing need for burial space. In 1712, Chaplain John Sharpe wrote of the burial of Africans "in the Common by those of their own country and complexion without the office, on the contrary the Heathenish rites are performed at the grave by their countrymen" (Sharpe 1712). The part of the Common on which the African (or

"Negroes") Burial Ground was established (see Figure 1.2) began outside the palisade of the colonial town near the summit of a hill whose slope inclined toward the fresh water pond known as the Collect (Kalkhook) (Foote 1993; Medford 2004, The New York African Burial Ground History Final Report/The African Burial Ground Project). The cemetery extended across 5.5 to 6 acres of land. Less than one city block of this site was excavated by archaeologists in 1991-1992. The filling of the Collect and grading and

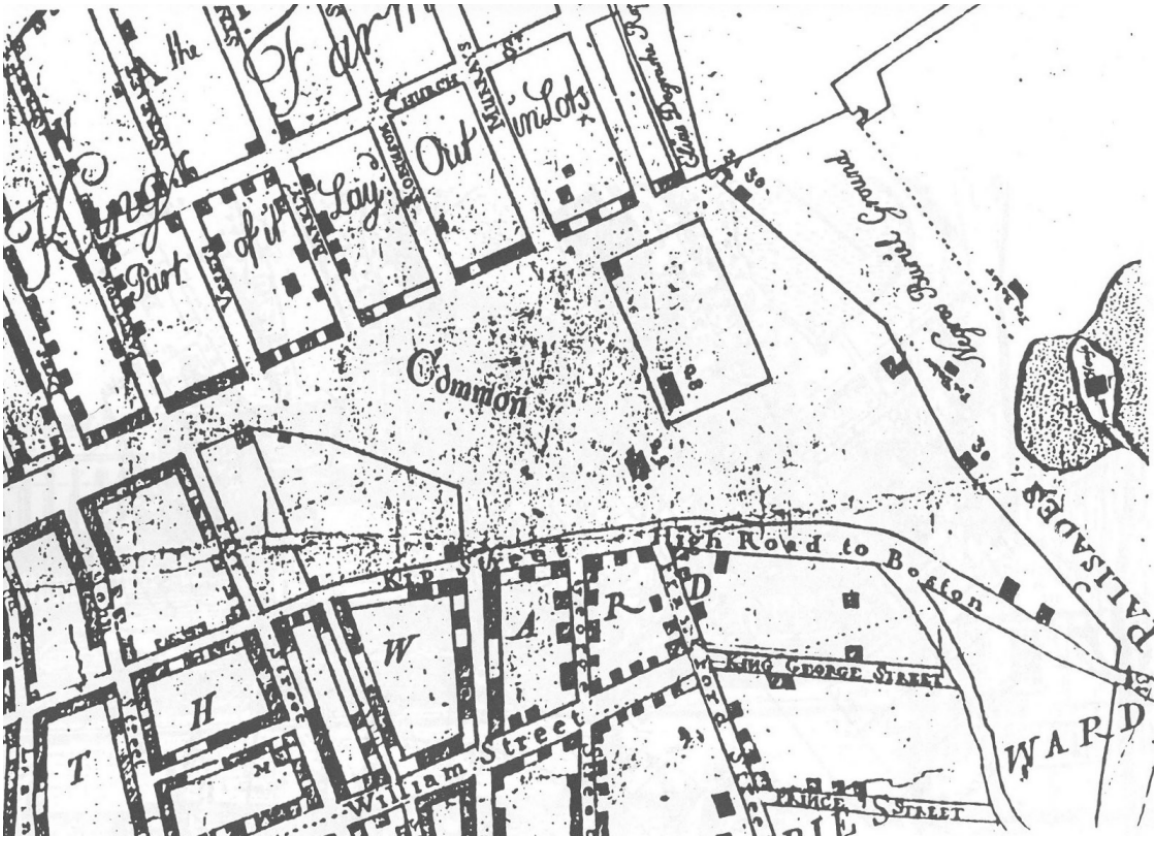

Figure 1.2: Map of the Eighteenth Century African Burial Ground, Maerschalck Plan (1755) in African Burial Ground and The Commons Historic District Designation Report, New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, February 1993.

flattening of that part of Manhattan Island at the turn of the nineteenth century preserved the excavated portion of the cemetery under 16-28 feet of fill.

The African Burial Ground (ABG) appears to have been one of the first social institutions built by Africans in colonial New York City (Medford, 2004). Burial of the dead and other funerary rituals are definitive characteristics of human existence. Such mortuary activities are as old as our species, and are both ubiquitous and unique to humanity. The cemetery may well have taken on special significance for affirming that they were human beings, for preserving cultures, and for maintaining a sense of hopefulness among New York's African community. In the main, Africans in colonial New York were enslaved, not free laborers, and thus experienced a particularly intensive contestation of their humanity by Europeans who were intent upon objectifying Africans as property. It is now obvious that in New York, as throughout the slave-holding Americas, enslaved Africans were arbitrarily stripped of names and renamed; family members were separated to be sold apart; social institutions and religious practices were disallowed or went underground; the use of African languages was suppressed, and the cultural history of those Africans was denigrated by slave-holders. In the urban context of colonial New York City, there were strikingly few opportunities for social interaction among African men, women, and children held in the isolated houses and businesses where they worked and slept (Medford, 2004).

Thus, efforts were made to deny these Africans the basic qualities that were associated with a distinctly human existence, which even the poorest European colonist could claim. The attribution of the role of "slave" or property to a human being (their conversion to chattel) required a method for denying the existence of the African's

humanity if both Africans and Europeans were to be convinced of the legitimacy of the master-slave relationship. Questioning of moral or other ideological legitimacy makes such inequitable structures vulnerable to internal questioning, conflict, and destruction (see for example Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* (1975) or Frederick Douglass' 1854 analysis (Douglass 1950) of the use of racist science in the mid-nineteenth century attempts to justify slavery). New York's ABG, then, can be viewed as an important location in which human qualities and rights were struggled for simply by virtue of careful, customary burial practices that no human society has been willing to do without. This act of assertion of humanity simultaneously represented resistance to the legitimation of slavery.

The ABG was also a location for the contestation of African humanity and for the establishment of white authority. The ban on African internments at Trinity Church (see Figure 1.3) and other Christian church cemeteries reflected the creation of social distance (the construction of the "Other") based not only on religion, but also increasingly upon "race" (see Epperson 1999 for an interesting discussion of the emergence of the race concept relative to the ABG).

Whether Africans were or were not Christian was an important distinction for the justification of enslavement. Like other attempts to distinguish enslaved blacks from true human beings, religious justification became a tangled web of desperate attempts to resolve its fundamental contradiction with the fact that blacks were indeed both human and considered property. The narrative of John Jea, who was brought to New York City from Calibar (bordering West and West Central Africa) and enslaved in the eighteenth century, is instructive (Gates and Andrews 1998). Jea describes his enforced conversion

Figure 1.3: Trinity Church in lower Manhattan today

to Christianity as a punishment by his "mean master" for questioning the duplicity of Christians who enslaved people. It was important that in the religious justification slaveholders affirmed their morality with black inferiority, by asserting that slavery constituted an act of Christian charity that sought to save African souls (see Douglass, 1950 [1854] and the discussion of Christian Central Africans in *The New York African Burial Ground History Final Report*. Jea discovered, however, that as a Christian convert, he obtained a legal right to manumission in New York. The project director argues that Jea had obtained by conversion a crucial measure of humanity in the logic of Western Europeans. This rather large contradiction or 'loophole' in the ideological justification of slavery in eighteenth century New York was amended by the requirement that Africans like Jea demonstrate the ability to read and understand passages from the Bible; although he was as illiterate as most of the colonial population, European, or

African. Jea claimed to have satisfied this requirement by divine intervention and gained his freedom (Jea in Gates and Andrews 1998).

The spatial exclusion of blacks from burial with whites in Christian sacred space was a significant part of the attempt to establish ideas to bring about the social control of New York Africans. Yet, as in the above reference to Sharpe's criticism of traditional African religious rites, the ABG on the municipal Commons also presented a threat of autonomous African thought and activity.

Even in the unsanctified space of the Commons, tight control of African activities was attempted. Night funerals were banned by law in 1722, and the gathering of more than "12 slaves admitted by the owner of the dead slave" was outlawed by a 1731 amendment to the law. The assembly of larger numbers of Africans who expressed cultural independence (conducted African funeral rituals) alarmed enslavers who were concerned that they were "plotting and confederating" for revolts and other "mischief" during funerals (Minutes of the Common Council 1722). African revolts occurred regularly in the Atlantic World. It is perhaps not insignificant that of the few written references made regarding the ABG by eighteenth century whites, most refer to its possible use for organizing revolts, as a place where African rebels were executed, or as the location of objectionable independent (traditional African or syncretic activity such as Pinkster Day) cultural activity.

The research team has considered individual cases in the ABG for what they might reveal about these events. At best such cases are only suggestive and cannot be established as having direct bearing on the revolts. For example, Burial 137, a 25-35 year old adult (see Figure 1.4), and Burial 354, a 35-45 year old male, contain bones whose

darkened, highly polished appearance is consistent with slight burning or singeing of bone. Historical evidence points to individuals being burned at the stake on the burial ground who were convicted of participating in the African revolt of 1712. The causes of the burns to Burials 137 and 354 are unknown. Other possible relationships between specific burials and corporal punishment or acts of terror are taken up in a previous report by Augustin Holl (2000), and are considered in the forthcoming *New York African Burial Ground Archaeology Final Report* that is in preparation.

Figure 1.4: Rib ends from Burial 137 showing likely heat induced darkening

The ABG was desecrated in diverse ways that relate to the contestation of African humanity. Archaeologists have found industrial waste from an adjacent ceramics factory on the site demonstrating its use as a dump by Europeans in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. In April 1788, the violent Doctors' Riot broke out when the petitions and published warnings of free black against grave robbers went unheeded by New York's medical establishment:

> That it hath lately been the constant Practice of a number of Young Gentlemen in this City who call themselves students of Physick to repair to the Burying Ground *adjudged* for the use of your Petitioners and under cover of the night and in the most wanton sallies of excess to dig up the bodies of the deceased friends and relatives of your Petitioners, carry them away, and without respect to age or

> sex, mangle their flesh out of a wanton curiosity and then expose it to Beasts and Birds (Unfiled Papers of the Common Council, see February 4, 1788, New York Municipal Archives).

The abductors were subsequently warned that "…they may not alone suffer abduction of their wealth, but perhaps their lives may be forfeit of their temerity should they dare to persist in their robberies, especially in unlawful hours of the night" (February 15, 1788, The *Daily Advertiser).* Again, these warnings suggest that the cemetery may have been especially important as an institution for the affirmation of African and African-American humanity under the material conditions of slavery and in the pervasive presence of the psychological affront to black humanity required to morally justify those conditions.

Here too, a case can be presented that is possibly, though not certainly, associated with events surrounding the early desecration of the cemetery. Burial 323 is a 19-30 year old male exhibiting evidence of substantial biomechanical stress and healed skull lesions that may represent an earlier period of nutritional inadequacy. The initial morphological assessment by the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team (MFAT), a group of consulting physical anthropologists from the City University of New York's Lehman College, indicated a "Caucasian" affiliation for this individual. He is among the 7 percent of individuals of the ABG sample who were assessed as non-African or ambiguous using racial typology. Strontium data points to an American place of birth for this individual, which would be unusual for adult enslaved Africans in New York (see Chapter 6 for the methodology pertaining to these findings). This individual was buried holding the top half of his skull in his arms (see Burial Descriptions section of this report). The skull had been deliberately sectioned, transversely, using a saw as is done in

autopsy or dissection in a gross anatomy laboratory (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). The burial is suggestive of the frequent grave robberies that had lead to the Doctors' Riot of 1788. If this burial had previously been looted (which can only be speculated) a careful, unusual reburial is intriguing.

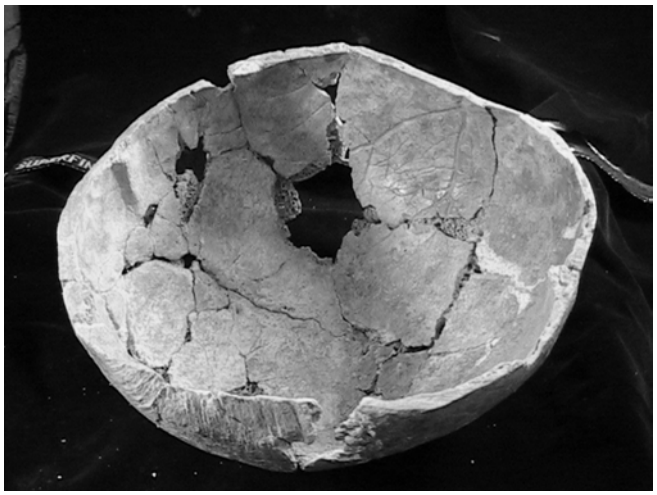

Figure 1.5: Burial 323 Transverse section of caldarium (top of skull)

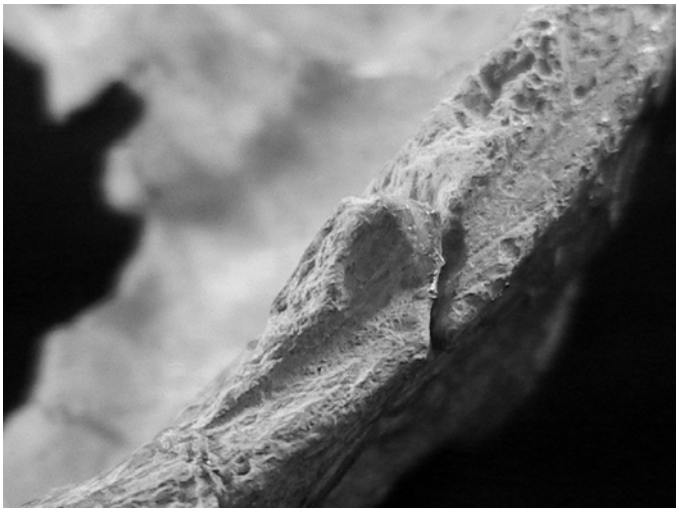

Figure 1.6: Burial 323 magnified saw marks

The ABG was closed in 1794 in the wake of the Doctors' Riot, the cemetery's overcrowding, and the petition of African Americans for a second "African Burial

Ground." The land comprising the cemetery was restored to the Van Borsum heirs (who had long claimed to own this part of the Commons) who divided it into house lots. The archaeological excavation showed that their privies and foundations were often dug into the burials.

Finally, the site was buried under several feet of fill at the turn of the nineteenth century and nearly forgotten. It is not known what African Americans thought of the elimination of their old cemetery. It is nonetheless evident that their century-long humane struggle to maintain their cemetery as sacred space was often challenged by desecration by whites, and that the first ABG was eventually overwhelmed by those challenges. The ABG reemerged two centuries later surrounded by disturbingly similar issues to the human rights concerns of the eighteenth century.

Blacks, who had been 20 percent of New York City's population at the time of the American Revolution, became a proportionately smaller community afterward. Although the massive waves of European immigration throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries account for much of the relative diminishment of blacks in the city, it should be mentioned that a major out-migration had occurred with the departure of the British and Tories right after the Revolution. Africans had fought for their own liberation on both sides of the Revolutionary War. Many of those who joined the British were manumitted and relocated to slave-holding Nova Scotia. Many of them remained dissatisfied and successfully negotiated relocation to Sierra Leone in West Africa.

In 1799, a law was passed that assured gradual emancipation in New York State, an emancipation that was effective with few exceptions in 1827. A dynamic free community then developed with important educational, religious, economic, cultural, and

political institutions that continued to struggle with subtler forms of racial discrimination than experienced during slavery. Religious justifications for social inequities were replaced by anthropological notions of the racial inferiority of blacks who, by mid-century, were predominantly Christian. A great migration occurred during the first half of the twentieth century as African Americans left the desperate conditions of the tenant farms in the post-plantation economy and Jim Crow segregation of the south in search of jobs in northern cities. New York's black community saw renewed growth, even a "Renaissance" of the "New Negro" in Harlem, despite continuing problems of racism and poverty that also motivated anti-lynching campaigns and a Back-to-Africa movement there. Civil Rights, Pan African, Left, Black Consciousness, Black Nationalist, Integrationist, and other political tendencies would characterize the diverse views of African Americans regarding their identity and betterment in New York throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

Recent Public Significance of the African Burial Ground

Much had changed by the time New York's ABG reemerged as a public concern. Indeed, in 1991 New York City had its first African-American Mayor, the Honorable David Dinkins and African Americans were represented on the city council and key legislative posts. Yet, the contestations about the humanity of blacks had continued. It seems that in the 1990s, the struggle for human equality had to do with the affects of racism in lending institutions, the workplace, police departments, the courts, and education (including anti-racist efforts to incorporate African and African-American history in public school curricula). While the protection of cemeteries as exemplars of

human dignity never seemed to emerge, the reaffirmation of the fundamental significance of the cemetery was stunning upon the rediscovery of the ABG.

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) took an expeditious approach to its building project at the burial ground in 1991 and 1992 that was broadly perceived as desecration. Archaeological mitigation of the project's destructive effects was also rushed, as archaeologists worked 11 hours per day, 7 days per week to remove remains without benefit of the guidance of a research plan. At regular meetings between the African-American public and the GSA, William Diamond, GSA Regional administrator, claimed to take up the public's demands with his superiors. Later, Diamond admitted in a Congressional hearing that he had never done so. The public requested an end to excavation and a fitting memorial. The GSA continued archaeological removal and building construction. Mr. Diamond described his feelings about those requests as resistance to being "blackballed or blackmailed" in a climate similar to the "Rodney King" incident (see the documentary film, *African Burial Ground: An American Discovery*, produced by David Kutz and written by Christopher Moore, 1994). The situation was indeed tense, as the African-American public became increasingly impatient with the GSA's dismissive attitudes that many felt would not have been directed toward the concerns of non-blacks in regard to the dignity of an historic cemetery (see testimony of Mayor David Dinkins, p. 189-194, Laurie Beckelman, Chair of the New York Landmarks Commission p. 212, and others during Congressional Hearings on July 27 in New York City and September 24 in Washington, DC, before the Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works and

Transportation, House of Representatives (102-80), US Government Printing Office 1992).

A Federal Advisory ("Steering") Committee would ultimately be established in the wake of massive protests, prayer vigils, and powerful black legislative intervention (Harrington 1993; LaRoche and Blakey 1997). The background to this situation, described in the Committee's recommendations to GSA and to Congress, is summarized next:

> In June 1991, human remains were discovered during archaeological testing of the site. By October 1991, excavation for the Foley Square Federal Office Tower Building had begun. ACHP [Advisory Council on Historic Preservation] and LPC [New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission] recommended that excavation only continue with an approved research design and with the input of the African [American] community. Unlike the burial grounds of Native Americans that are protected by law from this type of desecration [NAGPRA legislation of 1990], however, there is no specific law preventing the desecration of the burial grounds of Africans. Without a specific law preventing the desecration of the burials of Africans, GSA felt no obligation to halt the exhumations, consult with the community, or even respond to the very community whose ancestors' remains were being disinterred. Over the course of the next year, community groups, individual members of the community, and other government offices registered ongoing concern and dissatisfaction with the continued excavation. In May 1992, Mayor David Dinkins of New York City called together a group of citizens and formed the Mayor's Task Force on the African Burial Ground. Members of the Task Force formed the basis of the Steering Committee. By July 1992, at least 390 burials had been removed….
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> In response to a letter from Mayor Dinkins, GSA [indicating their violations of the National Historic Preservation Act by not responding to the community or having an acceptable research design] stated that they would excavate an additional 200 burials on a portion of the site that was to become a four-story pavilion beside the office building. GSA's position was essentially that the voice of the citizens, or even the voice of the local government, was not its concern, and that it would only respond to specific instructions from Congress. On July 27, 1992 after a one-day hearing held by Congressman Augustus Savage [African-American, Democrat from Illinois], Chairman of the House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds, GSA received those

> instructions. Congressman Savage heard testimony from Mayor Dinkins, LPC, GSA, and Dr. Sherrill Wilson (an African American anthropologist and historian), and Dr. Michael Blakey (an African American physical anthropologist). The Congressman expressed his dissatisfaction that, despite the recommendations to the contrary by both ACHP and LPC, construction had continued on the site without a research design that addressed the presence of human remains associated with the African Burial Ground. Congressman Savage found that the GSA had failed to live up to its Section 106 responsibilities and instructed the construction on the pavilion site halt immediately. Congressman Savage further informed GSA that no additional GSA projects would be funded until a meeting took place between the GSA Administrator and Congressman Savage.
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> In late July, meetings took place between GSA and Congressman Savage, Congressman Robert Roe (Chairman of the House Public Works Committee), and Congressman John Paul Hammerschmidt. Additional meetings took place between city agencies involved, and the decision was made that a Federal advisory committee of primarily descendant African community leaders and professionals be established to make recommendations to GSA with regard to its Section 106 responsibilities at the site…
>
> The Steering Committee…was chartered in October 1992 to represent the interests of the community and make recommendations to GSA and Congress regarding the present and future activities affecting the pavilion portion of the Federal construction site now known as the African Burial Ground. [Building of the tower portion of the site was permitted, including interpretive elements regarding the Burial Ground on its first floor]. Its mandate includes: (1) the review of proposals regarding the human remains on the Pavilion site, (2) the analysis, curation, and reinterment of remains removed from the African Burial Ground and (3) the construction of a memorial or other improvements on the Pavilion site.
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> Shortly after the Steering Committee was chartered, President Bush signed Public Law 103-393 ordering GSA to abandon construction on the Pavilion site, and approving the appropriation of up to $3 million to finance the modification of the Pavilion site and appropriate memorialization of the African Burial Ground. (Jorde 1993: 6-7).

Ironically, the "disrespect for a segment of this community" of which GSA was accused by Congressman Savage at the July 27 field hearing in New York may in fact have helped galvanize public resolve to uphold the dignity of the cemetery. With the

collaboration of community activists and the LPC, the site became a New York State and National Historic Landmark. Collaboration between private citizens and the National Park Service brought about the site's nomination to the United Nation's World Heritage Site list. It is the only African-American heritage site on that nomination list. The United Nations Human Rights Commission sponsored briefings in Geneva on preliminary African Burial Ground Project (ABGP) research findings in 1995 and 1996 (Blakey 1998) after New York and Los Angeles black human rights organizations (Malik Shabazz Human Rights Institute and Lift Every Voice, Inc.) brought the site to their attention. There had not been such public outcry about the desecration of an African-American cemetery's desecration since the Doctors Riots' at the NYABG and its adjacent pauper's field in 1788. The cemetery is of intense cultural and spiritual concern for many people of African descent in the United States and elsewhere.

Significance of the Project's Analytical Approach

Many aspects of the project are novel, not the least of which is the large number of skeletons (419) from the site constituting the largest colonial archaeological sample of any ethnic group available for study in the Americas and the earliest African cemetery in the United States. The human skeletal remains of the ABG provide a uniquely substantive body of primary evidence on eighteenth century colonial North America. It is a window that faces most directly toward the presence and conditions of Africans enslaved to build the English colonial foundations of the United States. This research also examines facts of life in other parts of the Americas to which these once living individuals and colonial New York's economy were closely connected.

These "intrinsic" qualities of the age and size of the ABG hold particular value for exploring the earliest phases of American history and for making statistical inferences from archaeological populations to a broader, contemporaneous community that requires the large sample of individuals found here. During the research team's first involvement at the site, in March of 1992 by invitation of the ACHP and Mayor Dinkins' liaison, it was clear that "intrinsic" archaeological value is subjective (Figure 1.7). Whatever the number or quality of the material evidence in the ground, the knowledge derived from it

Figure 1.7: Mayor David Dinkins (center), Peggy King Jorde (Mayor's Liaison), and Howard Dodson (Chief, Schomburg Center) (front) are briefed on the excavation by Michael Parrington (Principal Archaeologist for HCI and John Milner Associates).

is conditioned by the theoretical framework used to interpret data. The significance of data will depend partly on those interpretations as well as upon the ethical procedures (or lack there of) by which the data were obtained, affecting how people will or will not choose to relate to and use the information from an archaeological site.

The research project sought to maximize the significance of the information available from the site. New York's ABG clearly was and is a site of unique potential. Recognizing this fact, the research team drew from experts, first-hand experiences and benefited from their problems and /or limitations with previous studies. The research design also drew from compelling ideas under discussion by specialists in physical anthropology, archaeology, African Diasporic studies, epistemology, and ethics. The team believed that there were fundamental problems with the way in which smaller African-American bio-archaeological sites had been studied in the past, and this project provided an opportunity and obligation to reformulate the research approach to reflect what the team had learned about those mistakes. The team would apply the alternative approaches that it considered to be appropriate for this kind of site. The praxis of applying these new approaches would lead to better and more exciting kinds of information (including a clearer elucidation of technical and theoretical problems) than was obvious initially. Chapters 2 and 3 examine these past problems, our reformulation of research procedures in light of those problems, and the new avenues over which we were led by logic and circumstance in the course of the ABGP.

The research team's combination of academic and contract archaeology departs from previous contract work, and represents a particular trajectory in the practice of anthropology that is necessarily critical of previously acceptable standards. The ABGP's alternative approaches seek to represent new and better standards of anthropological practice. The project has embraced the commitment that this important site, and the humane community interests to which it relates, deserve the best alternative to

dehumanizing (objectifying) interpretations of African-American identity and history that the team is able to advance. The project competed to direct burial ground research at the end of excavation. The research team encountered forensic anthropologists (cum bioarchaeologists) and contract archaeologists, some of whose typical approaches were acceptable to perhaps most of our colleagues (See Epperson, 1999 and "Comments on the Draft Research design for Archaeological, Historical, and Bioanthropological Investigations of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Area"), yet were unacceptable to the team. The research team strives still to pursue alternate research practices and methodologies thus, some explanation is warranted since the team encountered many colleagues who were either strongly opposed or strongly in favor of its approach. The team asserts that its alternative approach enhances the scientific rigor, humanistic meaning, and societal significance of New York's ABG research.

By the 1990s two tendencies of African Diasporic bioarchaeology had become well defined. First, a biocultural approach utilizes the demography and epidemiology of archaeological populations in order to verify, augment, or critique the socioeconomic conditions and processes experienced by human communities. In its latest form, political economic theory structures the interpretation of biocultural relationships. The second, a forensic approach, utilizes in part the descriptive variables used by police departments for individual identifications (race, sex, age, and stature) along with pathology assessments in order to analyze human remains from archaeological sites. Yet the bioarchaeological context is not the appropriate place for the application of forensics, which tends to reveal archaeological samples in descriptive rather than historically dynamic ways. While the majority of the procedures for the technical assessment of the skeleton is the same for

both approaches, they differ in the extent to which a descriptive approach or forensics work relies on the objectified categories of biological race identification, without relying upon (or constructing) social, cultural, and historical information that is at the core of the biocultural approach. The result of descriptive/forensic work is the construction of an acultural and ahistorical group of individuals; the result of biocultural work is a biological reflection of the historical processes that bring about the social condition of a community of people. The forensic or descriptive approach, we maintain, is appropriate for police identifications, not for the interpretation of the ways of life in past human communities. Forensics is not bioarchaeology or paleopathology. An example of continued and increasing confusion on this point is the common use of the term "forensic anthropology" by students or contractors interested in bioarchaeology, perhaps due to the prominence of forensics in the American media.

A public struggle took place in New York that illustrates the contrast between these two approaches. The initial excavation teams at the site (Historic Conservation and Interpretation and the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team) included only one senior anthropologist who had had experience studying African American populations. This person had no relevant academic training and their legally mandated research design was glaringly absent historical knowledge of New York's African-American past and was twice rejected by the Federal and city agencies that were responsible for its evaluation. Forensic methods of race estimation were presented throughout debates at the site as representing an objective approach to the construction of the identity of the colonial population. These anthropologists' emphasis on racial traits, their obvious lack of knowledge of the study population's culture and history, coupled with the efforts of

some GSA officials, to fend off the African-American influence on the cemetery's disposition were responded to with deepening indignation by the descendant community members who witnessed the excavation.

Michael Blakey, at that time still a faculty member of the Howard University Department of Social Anthropology, assembled a team of physical anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians in the spring of 1992. This team prepared a design that began to establish the full scientific and historical significance of the site. The majority of these researchers were African Americans, and the team was more ethnically diverse than those assembled for previous bioarchaeological projects. The scholars who were selected held advanced and terminal degrees from leading university programs, were established leaders in their fields, and had a track record of research on the African Diaspora. They were also willing to apply biocultural approaches and inclined toward various forms of publicly-engaged scholarship (Blakey et al 1994) and activist scholarship, or, minimally, respected the rights of descendant communities to influence the disposition of their ancestral remains at archaeological sites. These sensibilities to public accountability stemmed largely from influences of African-American "vindicationist" scholarship (see Chapters 2-3 on the critical and corrective approaches to history, so labeled by the pioneering anthropologist, St. Clair Drake) and by the heightened dialogue with indigenous peoples (some of us had participated in discussions of the World Archaeological Congress and Native American Rights Fund, when many anthropologists were resistant even to meeting with indigenous peoples on the issue) that had recently led to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. The research team assumed that the African-American public should have the right to

determine the disposition of the site as, indeed, that community insisted on using the more general imprimatur of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as Amended) to assert its right of influence over "cultural resources." The research team has continued to develop upon the idea that these ethical demands and those of scientific rigor are not mutually exclusive and that the quality of knowledge can be enhanced by humane principles. The team invoked both the ethical principles of the American Anthropological Association and the Vermillion Accords of the World Archaeological Congress in support of community empowerment as a professional standard (La Roche and Blakey 1997).

By late June of 1992, the Congressional Sub-Committee on Transportation and Grounds (chaired by Hon. Gus Savage) in support of the Mayor of New York (Hon. David Dinkins) found that the GSA not in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and stopped excavation. The sub-committee turned over the decisions about what should be done with the excavated remains to a Federal Advisory ("Steering") Committee. The Steering Committee was chaired by Howard Dodson, Chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and consisted mainly of African-American activists and cultural workers. The project was then assigned to Howard University after a Congressional review showed that its Cobb Laboratory was best suited for the technical demands of the remaining analysis (see Figure 1.8). At that time, the Howard research project included the archaeological contract firm that had recently taken over the excavation (John Milner Associates, Inc.) for an extended period of transition. The Howard researchers regarded the descendant community as their ethical client and

Figure 1.8: Night Procession of the Ties That Bind Ceremony at Howard University marking the transfer of the African Burial Ground ancestral remains to an African Diasporic cultural and research institution in November of 1993 (photograph by Roy Lewis).

entered into intensive dialogue with this community about the possibility of anthropological research. Decisions regarding the kind of research to be done (if any were to be done at all) would depend on community acceptance of an evolving research design that would include methods to address lay people's questions (see Appendix A). The accepted research design document (Howard University and John Milner Associates 1993) proposed the most comprehensive interdisciplinary study then attempted, with studies that ranged from molecular genetics to African art history. Included on the team were specialists in the archaeology and history of relevant African, Caribbean, and North

American diasporic populations, all leading scholars and their most energetic students. The full range of the latest techniques for skeletal recordation and assessment (using as a guide a manuscript of the "Standards" of Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994, then in final preparation would be used. The problems presented for research included: the cultural origins, the physical quality of life, the transformations, and the resistance to slavery that could be gleaned from the data.

The current report responds to many of these problems in all of its chapters. After completion of the approved research, the skeletons were to be returned for reburial, and thereafter a monument and interpretive center were to be constructed. The vast majority of the proposed research goals have been achieved by the present research, although some hoped for objectives, particularly in ascertaining more fully the origins of the ABG sample, were not realized.

This study seeks to advance the biocultural approach in physical anthropology that resonated with living African-Americans rather than to engage in descriptive racialization and cursory history. The approach is amenable to synthesis with diasporic studies that both the African-American researchers and lay community leaders found intuitive. The ample involvement of humanists (historians, cultural anthropologists, and even artists involved in facial reconstruction and the interpretation of mortuary art) along with biologists is also consistent with the interdisciplinary approaches of African American Studies as conceived since the turn of the century. The study's focus was on revealing the diasporic experiences of the enslaved New York Africans, the history and identity of their descendants, and their descendant's empowerment in telling their own story and memorializing their own ancestors.

The team's facilitation of such African-American perspectives and concerns for the past led to accusations of "reverse discrimination," even though the project director in this instance had for the first time brought together a uniquely ethnically diverse team of physical anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians. Nonetheless, critics raised objections from the vantage point of their traditional theoretical and methodological perspectives. Indeed, attention given to the initial problem of black exclusion at the ABGP was also followed by a small but noticeable increase in outreach to black students by archaeological projects. It may simply have been the case that the debate about the consideration of race at the ABG site and in the research was contemporary with the wider debate then taking place throughout United States society.

During the 1990s, the NYABGP began developing a synthesis of biocultural anthropology with the African American tradition of diasporic studies. The signatories to the Memorandum of Agreement [U.S. General Services Administration, (GSA), New York Landmark Preservation Commission (NYLPC) and the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP)] initially expressed discomfort with the incorporation of African-American traditions of critical and corrective history and anthropology (earlier termed "vindicationist") in a draft of the Research Design, but the research plan was technically sound despite the lack of "multicultural" approaches that others insisted would make a more appropriate alternative, although such an alternative did not exist. The review of the April 1992 Research Design by the ACHP, for example, expressed concern that the local anthropologists did not have sufficient say in how the site would be treated and that too little attention was given to the spiritual significance of the site. They also stated that "In reviewing the research designs …we note a particular

tone in several statements describing the historic context for the proposed research. While we appreciate that the African Burial Ground site is of particular importance to African-Americans, we believe that such statements represent an ethnocentric perspective rather than the multicultural one appropriate for a document presented for federally sponsored scientific analysis, education, and public outreach" (Robert D. Bush to Robert Martin, 28 May 1993). The GSA's instructions to the Project's Scientific Director, who was responsible for the Research Design's content, were as follows:

> As to the political or ethnocentric overtones in the Research Design described at page 3 of the ACHP comments, please understand that the United States Government may not be a party to, or engage in, any form of discrimination, either in acts or language. Accordingly, please review the entire Research Design, deleting any discriminatory references, inferences or attributions, etc., in the document (Lydia Ortiz to Michael Blakey, 13 September 1993).

In fact, no changes would be made because no discriminatory content existed. The passages to which the ACHP referred were simply definitive of the concerns and critical perspective of African Diasporic scholarship. It seemed that to affirm the vindicationist or corrective value of the site made our work more meaningful to some and more threatening to others. This is not to lay blame, as indeed the ACHP would give key support to efforts to complete the research and memorialization of the site. It is to say that misunderstanding and philosophical differences related to America's racial divide emerged essentially around the fact that the research was being organized by blacks who were distinct in more ways than pigmentation. Many anthropologists expressed fears that the project supported the notion that only blacks could study black sites, which was a position never put forward by the project; indeed, our research team consisted of racially diverse scholars. These "ethnocentric" concepts were sufficiently resonant with the

descendant community's perceptions of the site's archaeological significance that whole paragraphs of the Research Design were incorporated in the Memorialization Proposal of the Steering Committee as a public expression without reference to the Research Design. Presented below is a key paragraph from the allegedly "ethnocentric" portion of the Research Design, which is quoted in the first case and paraphrased in the second:

> Due to the circumstances that have brought about their presence, these material remains of African ancestors present themselves during a time of social and emotional strife when inspirational uplift is most needed in the African-American community; during a time when evidence of the significance of racism in America needs desperately to be brought to bear on the minds of Euro-Americans; and during a time when there is a thirst for knowledge about African heritage that has propelled heated debates about the adequacies of American education. These African ancestral remains have presented both a challenge and opportunity to simultaneously address these issues (Research Design Subcommittee, 6 August 1993/ also see Appendix A).

> Today the remains of our ancestors present themselves, literally risen from their graves, during a time of social and emotional strife, when inspirational uplift is most needed in the African community, when evidence of the significance of racism in the United States needs desperately to be brought to bear in the minds of all persons, and during a time when knowledge about the African heritage is both distorted and inadequate. The memorialization of the African ancestral remains presents an opportunity to address these issues (International Reinterment Subcommittee, 6 August 1993).

This is one of many examples of widely differing views, often along racial lines, of the research effort. In this instance, the ACHP raised formal objections to African Americans defining the significance of the ABG for themselves, and for addressing their research effort to their own traditions of critical scholarship. Why, one might ask, are nationally or ethnically-specific schools of thought such as "British social anthropology," "the Boasian school" or "French structuralism" acceptable avenues to follow, while

influences of an African-American school of thought are not? Perhaps the problem was one of simple lack of familiarity regarding black intellectual traditions. The research team drew from the tradition of corrective scholarship (vindicationism), synthesizing what seems useful in these and other ideas, taking a progressive approach to knowledge. As Chapter 3 will make clear, this is quite different from the classical orientation of what is often represented as Afrocentrism and Afrocentricity (see critiques by Blakey 1995).

These ideas, in the context of the earliest, largest, and most publicly visible site of its kind, put African-American bioarchaeology in the forefront of anthropological research for the first time (Blakey 2000). Furthermore, this is not simply an African-American site or, as many continue to imagine, one whose interpretation simply is led by African Americans. Rather, the ABG, a major American archaeological site whose analysis is informed by African-American intellectual traditions as well.

The site's visibility was also a result of the public's struggles that were required to stop excavation. The ensuing controversy was viewed by the descendant community as a continued refutation of African-American humanity and dignity. This attention to the site has also resulted from the powerful revelations that the excavation and the research team's initial findings produced about a past of African enslavement and African contributions to nation building that had been buried and hidden from the American consciousness (Blakey 1998). Indeed the educated public had long been taught that there had been few blacks and no slavery in the American North. Now the undeniable contradictory evidence confirmed the African-American vindicationist critique of pervasive Eurocentric distortion of American and world history.

Report Scope, Limitations and Future Directions

Much has been accomplished with the approximately $6 million in Federal funds awarded to Howard University for the ABGP research. This document is the skeletal biology component of three reports, the others covering the written history of these New York Africans (*History Final Report*) and the mortuary archaeological evidence (*Archaeology Final Report*, in preparation). Together, these reports will provide insight into how these people once thought and lived. Initially, the research design envisioned the incorporation of chemical and DNA research that would result in ancillary genetics and chemical studies reports. These five disciplinary reports were to serve as interim deliverables whose multidisciplinary data would be merged as an interdisciplinary, integrated report.

The research team's plan was to defer the complete DNA, chemistry, and histology research that it was proposing for support, because it would involve cutting samples of bone and teeth, and schedule it for the last two years of the project. Although GSA funded initial pilot studies (DNA, bone chemistry, histology and amino acid analysis), it declined to fund the other proposed studies. Also, the team's efforts to obtain extramural support from other sources were unsuccessful.

Hence, those components of the anticipated research were not undertaken. Because the complete DNA and chemical studies were not performed, several key areas of research that depended on such data, including origins/cultural affiliation, individual geographical migrations, sub-adult sex determinations, ethnic and familial burial and social relationships, stasis and transformation in ethnic and familial spatial clustering, and studies of disease specificity—such as genetic anemia or specific treponemal diseases for

which the spirochete's DNA can be tested—could not be pursued. However, these determinations by DNA and chemistry were not possible for most twentieth century paleopathology, and thus this research project is not unusual in these respects. The proposed research design, however, laid out a feasible plan for the use of these new technologies that would have placed the project at the vanguard in the use of what are now increasingly common twenty-first century molecular and chemical techniques. Nonetheless, the researchers believe that the results in other related aspects of this study have laid the groundwork and positioned them to pursue funding for the exploration of future genetic research.

The researchers in the skeletal biology component of the ABGP remain committed to the preparation of the integrated report. The regular sharing of data across disciplines has produced an interdisciplinary dialogue; especially, the four-day Sankofa meetings, of which there were three, where two dozen project specialists participated, producing an interdisciplinary dialog and common organizing themes and research questions (see Chapter 3 for the latter) that influence each disciplinary report. The organizing themes include origins and arrivals, life in New York, death in New York, and the meaning of ancestors to the descendant community. The present chapter focuses on those perceptions of ancestors and the remainder of Section I covers origins and arrivals. Section II is dedicated to the assessment and documentation of living conditions and Section III turns to the conditions of life and death. Thus, the present Skeletal Biology Report is not meant to achieve the goals of interdisciplinary integration by itself, but has multidisciplinary influences that become evident. Because of the common organization of themes and questions, as well as 10 years of dialog among specialists, the disciplinary

reports such as this one are primed for integration into a single narrative about the NYABG.

Organization of the Report

The report is organized as four sections and 15 chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides a broad comparative context for the analysis of the remains from the New York site. The major reports on skeletal remains from African Diasporic archaeological sites in the Americas are reviewed. That chapter also develops a social historical and critical perspective on previous studies as background for the present study and its innovations. Chapter 3 describes the theoretical orientation of the project as a newly evolved program that is served by adherence to public accountability, a critique of the politics of history, publicly-engaged scholarship, and aspirations toward rigorous multidisciplinary interrogation of the material data of the site within a broad geopolitical context. The complimentarity of ethical principles and high quality information is emphasized as a benefit of this approach, which is catholic in its open-endedness for the application of many different theories that may be found useful for the diverse methods and research questions of the project. Finally, Section I describes the practical methods and work organization required for data collection in the laboratory. The analysis and interpretation of those data are taken up in the three remaining sections of this report.

Section II focuses upon the origins and arrival of Africans in eighteenth century New York City. Chapter 5 examines the available biological information that verifies the African genetic backgrounds of the archaeological population. Fatimah Jackson and her colleague's advance theory, methods, and results related to estimation of the societal

origins of the African Diaspora. The results of the morphological, chemical, and molecular studies they report are more extensive than usually found in reports on sites of this kind (see Chapter 2) and give us a good idea of the range of origins of this sample. Yet, this chapter also demonstrates the much greater potential for DNA analysis that the theoretical development of this project continues to point toward. The ABGP has stayed on the routes mapped out in the Research Design. Members of the research team, along with our students and interested colleagues, plan to continue on this course in our academic institutions over the coming years, supported by funding that we will seek at various intramural and extramural sources for proposed research. Bone and dental samples were prepared by the project with permission of the descendant community for these purposes. Therefore, for components of the research plan that were not funded, we report on some of the project's contributions to theoretical and methodological development toward goals such as, for example, the utility of DNA and chemical methods for estimating African-American origins, the interest in which continues to grow among scholars and the public. Chapter 6 takes another approach to origins applying new methodology to ascertaining the places of birth and geographical movements of the individuals who were been buried in New York.

Chemical sourcing data derive from exposure to different proportions of chemical elements characterizing the different environments to which individuals were exposed during their lifetimes. Alan Goodman and his associates have discovered some of these 'chemical signatures' in the teeth of the ABG sample that suggest where in the world individuals' childhoods were spent. Modest alternative funding, the time of volunteers, and in-kind facilities partially supported important studies. Though their potentials are

not fully realized, these DNA and chemical studies of the origins of the people in the burial ground have provided very useful information. Although doubted by many, (see "Comments on the Draft Research Design for Archaeological, Historical, and Bioanthropological Investigations of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Area," New York, New York, General Services Administration, Region 2, 1993) when first proposed, these chapters, we believe, make it clear in a material way that our proposals advanced ten years ago were on the cusp of a wave of technology and hence our ideas have been used to good purpose.

Bridging Sections II and III is Chapter 7 that reconstructs the structure of the New York African population using data on the sex and age estimates on more than 300 well preserved skeletons. These data constitute the first and only systematic information on death rates among enslaved Africans in New York City. Information about migration and population growth – with implications for fertility – is generated on the basis of census and other historical sources. In Chapter 13, these patterns of life and death described by Lesley Rankin-Hill, Michael Blakey and their colleagues, are explained as resulting from political and economic forces, not only in New York, but throughout the Atlantic world. Michael Blakey and the coauthors of Chapter 8 analyze dental enamel defects due to the disrupted growth of teeth, which resulted, not from local problems in the mouth, but from generalized diseases and malnutrition. These results show high stress during childhood. These authors begin to explore comparisons of those known to be born in Africa and those of unknown natality (probably a mix of African and American born).

Dental pathology is examined in Mark Mack's study of caries and abscesses in Chapter 9. These pathologies represent the infectious effects of carbohydrate-rich food,

sugars, and poor dental care. These indicators also provide dietary information based on the local effects of food affecting the mouth during the consumption of meals. However, oral diseases may also burden the immune system's responses to other diseases in the body.

Chapter 10 also shows remarkable similarity between the bony indicators of infectious disease rates and nutritional deficiency found in New York and the small series of skeletons from Rathbun's South Carolina site (1987). In addition, Christopher Null and his coauthors examine active and healed periosteal lesions representing generalized infection to show differences by age and sex. Special attention is given to treponemal diseases that connect New York to other regions and populations in the wake of European colonialism. Comparisons are also made with Nineteenth century Philadelphia and post-Reconstruction wage laborers.

Section III continues the examination of "Life and Death in New York" with Chapter 11 focused on the musculoskeletal effects of the mechanical forces of work and trauma. Cynthia Wilczak and her group have found patterns of work stress evidenced by spinal and limb joint degeneration among men and women in the ABG community. Enlarged muscle attachments and other MSMs (musculoskeletal stress markers) also demonstrate that arduous labor had characterized the lives of both men and women. Some evidence points to different kinds of work, perhaps, among some individuals within these groups although it is not materially clear just how different had been the work of many men and women. Traumatic fractures that occurred near to the time of death are common in the population. Comparisons are made with studies of African-American

archaeological sites in different work settings that show a number of associations between the effects of work in New York and on a South Carolina plantation.

In Chapter 12, Susan Goode-Null and colleagues examine childhood growth, using dental development as a proxy for chronological age. They find evidence for slowed, disrupted, and stunted growth in long bones among the NYABG sample when the results are compared against a model of current growth standards. These researchers reference a broad range of pathology, nutritional, and mechanical factors that relate to delays they find in the physical growth and maturation of the enslaved children interred in the NYABG. The thirteenth chapter, as previously mentioned, returns to demographic analysis, but this now considers the data within a broader political-economic scope. Comparative analysis confirms the presence of unusual and previously unrecognized patterns of early death among the captive African community of early New York. Mortality data on the contemporaneous English slave-holding population are from Trinity Church burial records organized and formatted for analyses by the NYABG Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) in New York. There are some stunning comparisons of the massive population-wide effects of slavery. Slave holders and African captives exhibit opposing demographic trends of privilege and devastation. This section ends with a synthesis of the report's findings in Chapter 14.

Section IV consists entirely of descriptions of individual burials by Rankin-Hill and her associates at the University of Oklahoma and William and Mary, rendering a brief profile of each individual's case from data contributed by the various studies undertaken in this project.

New York's enslaved African population was highly stressed by all accounts. Specific variations in the skeletons have provided insight into certain aspects of the living experience of this otherwise poorly documented community of America's founders. The skeleton mainly imparts to us the physical quality of life against which an individual's social and psychological struggles and accomplishments may be appreciated. There is much that paleopathology cannot reveal, but skeletons offer leads to patterns and details of this human story that are absent in other lines of evidence, and it is the combination of different lines of evidence that makes the ABGP most exciting. This report constitutes the final step in the skeletal biology research team's study prior to its participation, along with leaders of the two other project research components, in collaboration with Howard University's ABGP management, in the preparation of a single interdisciplinary academic volume, which will integrate skeletal biological, historical, and archaeological findings. Also, the proposed *Integrated Report* will be written for a broader audience than are the three technical, disciplinary reports. Thus, in this chapter, we have established the material evidence for this report's conclusions and also outlined the processes by which the evidence was observed, analyzed and interpreted.